

## North Yorkshire County Council

9 November 2016

### Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

#### Chairman's Statement

1. My statement for this full council includes details of the Committee meeting held on 26 October 2016.

#### **Committee – 26 October 2016**

##### Highways Major Schemes List Review

2. The Committee received details of the process and progress of the major highway schemes review. The 23 historic schemes under review include bypasses, relief roads and larger bridges, each costing more than £5m.
3. The Committee broadly welcomed the approach, recognising that the County Council needs to be more realistic in what it can fund especially in light of reduced budgets and changes in funding structures. The priority now at both the regional and national level is about supporting schemes that will make a substantial contribution to promoting and sustaining economic growth. The schemes will be reviewed with reference to the County Council's Strategic Transport Prospectus – with its emphasis on improving east-west connectivity in the county.
4. We acknowledged that withdrawing some of the schemes from the list will also reduce the risk of additional financial burden upon the County Council for potential blight issues on proposals that have little or no chance of being implemented in the foreseeable future. By the same token it will give reassurance to homeowners living nearby in those areas.
5. Members whose divisions are in each of the scheme areas have or will shortly be consulted on their view on the officer assessments.

##### Passenger Rail Update

6. The Committee received an update on the short term rail priorities for North Yorkshire and an overview of the recently awarded Northern and TransPennine rail franchises.
7. The Committee noted that the improvements promised in the delivery of the new franchises will be the first step towards improving access to High Speed and conventional rail. That said there remains a long way to go and as things stand there remains a 'three tier' rail system – national, regional and local. However it is down to us as the County Council and working with partners through Transport

for the North at the regional level to improve the rail connections through those three tiers.

8. We will receive an update report in a year's time to monitor the progress of the franchise improvements relating to railway lines in North Yorkshire including associated improvements to the rail facilities and capacity.

## Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton railway line reinstatement

9. We also received a further request at our meeting from Ripon City Council for the County Council to pledge funding towards a feasibility study for the reinstatement of the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton railway line. Last year the Committee had given in principle support to the scheme to reinstate the line and had recommended that the Executive considered providing a financial contribution towards the cost of the feasibility study.
10. The request had been considered by BES Executive Members in June 2015 but they wanted to get a better understanding of where such a proposal rated in importance relative to other transport initiatives before making a decision. Subsequently it became known that Network Rail was considering opportunities for a diversionary route between York and Newcastle so might in due course fund its own feasibility study. Transport for the North also wishes to see shorter journey times between Leeds and Newcastle.
11. Without rail industry agreement there will be no chance that the scheme will progress. Therefore whilst the majority of the Committee continues to support in principle the reinstatement of the line, we agreed that the County Council alongside other relevant local partners should meet with Network Rail to discuss future options and to establish if we can get rail industry agreement for reinstatement of the line. We were also of the view that the cost of any subsequent feasibility study should not rest wholly on the shoulders of the County Council but should include contributions from Ripon City Council, Harrogate Borough Council and Hambleton District Council.

## Overview of the work being led by YNYER LEP to understand the potential impact and proposed solutions for agriculture and the wider rural economy pending exit from the EU

12. David Smurthwaite (Head of Planning at Craven District Council and secondee to the YNYER LEP) gave an overview of the comprehensive piece of work being led by the LEP to understand the potential impact and proposed solutions for agriculture and the wider rural economy pending the UK's exit from the European Union. Consultees include farmers, the National Farmers Union, DEFRA, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and Nidderdale AONB. Issues being looked at relate to:
  - Stronger Rural Dynamic Growth– creating a higher value economy driven by a successful agritech sector and also through support for our growing market towns
  - Greater Environment for All – biodiversity and flood management

- Greater Productivity and Strong Farm Businesses - improving productivity of farms and creating quality farm businesses; reaching a balance between higher productivity and the environment.
- Lighter bureaucracy – capitalising upon devolution to tackle bureaucracy; creating simpler local funding schemes.

13. We are appreciative of the work that the LEP is doing to investigate opportunities and issues for agriculture and the rural economy but we also noted that concerns about the impact of leaving the EU go beyond rural areas and include the economy for the county as a whole. We intend to have a watching brief on the broader impacts for the economy and set up a sub-committee to take soundings after Article 50 has been triggered in late March next year.

#### Operational review of Public Rights of Way

14. The Committee was provided with an overview of the review of the Public Rights of Way Service following the restructure that was carried out last year.
15. Key parts of the review include implementing a comprehensive and transparent route categorisation of all the paths on the network and making greater use of community and user groups to maintain or improve the network.
16. Members noted that through their links with parish councils, some Public Rights of Way are well-used whilst others are lost and there are often a range of different and sometimes competing interests within the same community about Public Rights of Way! We felt therefore that having a standardised route categorisation, as recommended in the report, is a sensible approach. This will help to ensure that resources are deployed in a more transparent way and not allocated on a 'he who shouts loudest' basis.

#### **County Councillor Andrew Backhouse Chairman**

Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
County Hall  
Northallerton

31 October 2016